

DECISION RECORD

Decision: It is my decision to authorize the issuance of a term grazing permit of public lands on the Price Ranch, Allotment #64071. Any additional mitigation measures identified in the environmental impacts sections of the attached environmental assessment have been formulated into stipulations, terms and conditions. Any comments made to this proposed treatment were considered and any necessary changes have been incorporated into the environmental assessment.

In accordance with 43 CFR 4160.2, any applicant, permittee, lessee, or other affected interests may protest this proposed decision in person or in writing to the authorized officer within 15 days after receipt of this decision. Please be specific in your points of protest. In the absence of a protest, this decision will become final without further notice.

Written appeal may be filed to the Final Decision for the purpose of a hearing before an administrative law judge under 43 CFR 4.470. A period of 30 days after receipt of the Final Decision is provided in which to file an appeal in this office. (43 CFR 4160.3 (c))

signed by T. R. Kreager
Assistant Field Manager

12/1/99
Date

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
for
GRAZING AUTHORIZATION**

ALLOTMENT 64071

EA-NM-060-98-097

OCTOBER, 1998

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Roswell Field Office
Roswell, New Mexico**

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I. Introduction

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The grazing regulations (43 Code of Federal Regulations 4110) allow for a ten year permit to be issued for grazing inside the grazing district boundary. The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) (October, 1997) states a livestock grazing management goal of providing effective and efficient management of allotments to maintain, improve and monitor range conditions. A site specific analysis of the impacts of renewing a grazing permit to the applicants, George and Sharion Price, is needed for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and to make an informed decision.

This document will analyze the site specifics of authorizing the renewal of the permit on Allotment 64071, other future actions such as range improvement projects will be addressed in a project specific environmental assessment. There are no current plans for additional management actions on this allotment. This allotment is within the Mixed desert shrub vegetative community as identified in the Roswell RMP/EIS. Vegetative communities managed by the Roswell Field Office are identified and explained in the RMP/EIS. Appendix 11 of the Draft RMP/EIS describes the Desired Plant Community (DPC) concept and identifies the components of each community.

B. Conformance with Land Use Planning

The Roswell RMP/EIS has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the lands use plan's Record of Decision. The Roswell RMP/EIS states a livestock grazing management goal of providing effective and efficient management of allotment to maintain, improve and monitor range conditions. The proposed action is consistent with the RMP/EIS.

C. Relationships to Statues, Regulations, or Other Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management

Act of 1976 (FLPMA) (43 U.S.C. 1700 et seq.); the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (TGA) (43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.), as amended; the Clean Water Act (CWA) (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.), as amended; the Endangered Species Act (ESA) (16 U.S.C. 1535 et seq.) As amended; and the Public Rangeland Improvement Act of 1978 (PRIA) (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.)

II. Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action

The proposed action is to authorize a grazing permit on Allotment 64071 for 2 Animal Units (AUs) year long at 100% Federal Range for 24 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) for the term of ten years. The permit would be offered to George and Sharion Price.

B. No Authorization Alternative

This alternative, if selected, would be to not issue a grazing permit for Allotment 64071. No grazing would be authorized on the federal land within the allotment.

III. Affected Environment

A. General Setting

Allotment 64071 is located in Chaves County, about 20 miles southwest of Roswell, New Mexico. The allotment is made up of 2 pastures, 1 of which contains the federal land. The allotment is watered by water pipeline system. The allotment consists of 80 acres of public land and 2,560 acres of private land (See attached map).

This allotment lies inside the Roswell Grazing District Boundary, established subsequent to the Taylor Grazing Act, and it is administered under Section 3 of the TGA. Normally, the permitted use on a Section 3 permit is established by the amount of forage produced on the public lands and all other controlled lands, such as private, leased and state grazing leased lands. The public animal unit months are then derived from the amount of forage from the public lands in relationship to all forage produced. However, due to the small amount of public land (80 acres) on this allotment, the BLM does not control the number of stock allowed on the entire ranch.

The area of Allotment 64071 consists of rolling grass covered hills, with a mixed desert shrub aspect. The average elevation is 3990 feet above sea level. Grass species consist of 96 percent of the existing plant community. The average

recorded precipitation for the area is 12.58 inches (recorded in Roswell, NM). Most of the annual precipitation falls during high intensity, short duration thunderstorms occurring from May to October.

The following resources or values have been evaluated and are either not present or are not affected by the proposed action or alternatives in the EA: Prime/Unique Farmlands, Cultural Resources, Native American Religious Concerns, Flood plains, Wetlands & Riparian Zones, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Hazardous Wastes, and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. The impact of the proposed action and alternative to minority or low-income populations or communities has been considered and no significant impact is anticipated.

B. Affected Resources

1. Soils

The soils present on Allotment #64071 are the Lozier-Tencee complex. This complex occurs on low, limestone and indurated caliche hills. The complex consists of about 50 percent Lozier cobbly loam, 30 percent Tencee cobbly loam, and 20 percent less extensive soils. Permeability is moderate and available water capacity is 1.0 to 2.5 inches. Runoff for these soils is medium, the hazard of water erosion is slight or moderate, and the hazard of soil blowing is slight.

The Lozier series consists of very shallow and shallow, well drained soils. They are formed in cobbly residual materials on low limestone hills; the surface materials are brown cobbly loams about 6 inches thick which is moderately calcareous, while the underlying material is light yellowish brown cobbly loam about 7 inches thick and is strongly calcareous. Fractured limestone is at a depth of 13 inches. The soil profile is moderately alkaline throughout.

The Tencee Series also consists of well drained soils which are shallow to very shallow to indurated caliche. They are formed in gravelly and cobbly alluvium on uplands. The surface material is yellowish brown gravelly loam about 2 inches thick. The subsoil is brown loam about 3 inches thick. The substratum is brown very gravelly loam about 4 inches thick. White indurated caliche is at a depth of 9 inches and extends to a depth of 31 inches. The soil profile is strongly calcareous and moderately alkaline throughout. More information on these soils can be found in the "Soil Survey of Chaves County, New Mexico, Southern Part".

2. Vegetation

The vegetation on the public land within Allotment #64071 fits the Shallow SD-3 Range Site description. Black grama is the most abundant grass found, while burrograss, sand dropseed, tridens, sand muhly, tobosa and three-awn are also found. Shrubs such as catclaw mimosa, yucca, broom snakeweed, littleleaf sumac, creosote and javelinabush are also common on this range site. Forbs

which may occur in this area are stemless actinea, wooly groundsel, bladderpod, and globemallow. The forb component varies from year to year, dependent upon the amount and timing of precipitation.

There is one vegetative study on this allotment, established in 1991. Analysis of the monitoring data collected indicates that there is sufficient vegetation to meet multiple resource requirements and forage for 2 Animal Units (AUs). The data shows the ecological condition for the area evaluated to be in good condition. Copies of the monitoring data and the analysis of the data are available at the Roswell Field Office.

3. Wildlife

The area provides habitat for small animals, birds, rodents, and a small population of mule deer. The area does contain motts of brush or tree species that could provide quality cover for the larger animals. The allotment is located in the Macho Wildlife Habitat Area (WHA). The management goal for the WHA is to manage for a healthy population of pronghorn within the special management area.

4. Threatened and Endangered Species

The only known threatened or endangered species of plant or animals potentially on Allotment 64071 is the bald eagle. A list of federal threatened, endangered and candidate species reviewed for this EA can be found in Appendix 11 of the Roswell Approved RMP (AP11-2). Of the listed species, avian species such as the bald eagle and peregrine falcon may be observed in the general geographic area during migration or winter months. There are no designated critical habitat areas within this allotment.

5. Livestock Management

The allotment is grazed by cattle, alternating between a cow-calf and a yearling operation. The latest grazing permit was for 2 cows. The cattle are rotated in the pastures, using a best pasture rotation system. As the public land lies within one pasture on the uplands, rest periods are generally occur during the summer when the cattle are moved to an area of all private land.

6. Visual Resources

Allotment 64071 is located in a Class IV Visual Resource Management (VRM) Area. The Class IV rating means that contrasts may attract attention and be a dominant feature in the landscape in terms of scale. However, changes should repeat the basic elements of the landscape.

7. Water Quality

No permanent live water exists in the area but runoff does collect in depressions during precipitation events. Dirt tanks are the only surface water, none of which

are located on the public land. The amount of water and period of retention are dependent on the weather conditions. Ground water is pumped from one drilled well, which is located on private surface. The quality of the well water is adequate.

8. Air Quality

Air quality is good. The area is in a Class II area for the prevention of significant deterioration of air, as defined in the federal Clean Air Act. Class II areas allow a moderate amount of air quality degradation.

9. Recreation, Caves and Karst

Recreation opportunities are very limited in this grazing allotment because the public has limited legal/physical access to public lands. The parcel of public land within this allotment is surrounded by private lands.

Off Highway Vehicle designation for the public land within this allotment is classified as "Limited" to existing roads and trails.

Caves and Karst: A complete significant cave or karst inventory has not been completed for the public land located in this grazing allotment. Presently, no known significant caves or karst features have been identified within this allotment. If at a later date, a significant cave or karst feature is located on public land within this allotment, that cave or feature may be fenced to exclude livestock grazing and Off Highway Vehicle Use. A separate Environmental analysis would be prepared to construct this enclosure fence.

This allotment is located within a designated area of Low Karst or Cave Potential.

IV. Environmental Impacts

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action

1. Soils

The soils will be influenced by livestock grazing directly by compaction, trailing that may break through the turf, chipping of soil surface caused by hoof action, and recycling of nutrients. Infiltration rates will be increased by chipping of soil surface over most of the area but will be decreased by compaction around watering, trailing, and bedding areas. The area of compaction would be relatively small. Livestock remove vegetation that would have reduced the erosive forces of wind, rain and surface runoff. Proper utilization levels and grazing distribution patterns under the present operation retain sufficient vegetative cover so as to maintain the stability of the soils. The level of grazing identified in the proposed action would continue to maintain an adequate ground cover for protection and

the development of the soils. The percentage of bare ground and rock found on the public land within the allotment fall within the parameters established by the RMP/EIS for this vegetative community.

2. Vegetation

Vegetation grazing by domestic livestock and wildlife is not adversely affected unless the amount of utilization is severe over an extended period of time. Ecological condition as shown by the data collected in 1991 indicated the vegetation is sustainable at the proposed amount of grazing by livestock.

3. Wildlife

Wildlife will continue to compete with domestic livestock for forage and browse. Cover habitat for wildlife will remain the same as the existing situation. Maintenance and operation of existing watering will continue to provide dependable water sources for wildlife, as well as livestock.

4. Threatened and Endangered Species

Livestock grazing, as a result of renewal of the grazing permit, may affect, but not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle. It is expected that habitat and range condition would be maintained or improved by authorizing grazing conducive with vegetation production goals. Habitat for wintering bald eagles would not be negatively impacted by livestock grazing. There would be no effect to the peregrine falcon as important riparian habitat or potential nest sites are not found on the allotment.

5. Livestock Management

The proposed action would allow the existing livestock management to continue. The existing management is not causing any adverse impacts to the environment. The distribution and supply of livestock water is available for wildlife. Livestock under rotation grazing will continue to maintain or increase ground cover by stimulating growth of vegetation and by scattering litter which protects the soil from wind and water erosion.

6. Visual Resources

Visual resources will be managed to meet the Visual Resource Management class. All proposed management activities will be evaluated with regard to visual resource management and those project that are compatible with the character of the natural landscape will be encouraged. No management actions should be proposed that would degrade visual quality to the extent that a change in any VRM class will result. The continued grazing of livestock would not affect the form or color of the landscape, or the primary aspect of the vegetation within the allotment.

7. Water Quality

Livestock grazing will not have a significant influence on water quality. Any surface water is located in dirt tanks on private land which have received the limited amount of runoff. The amount of sediment into the dirt tanks is directly related to the intensity and duration of the precipitation occurrence and affected only slightly by livestock grazing activities. Ground water is pumped from a well. The ground water is not affected by livestock grazing.

8. Air Quality

The proposed action will not have an effect on the air quality. The air quality will remain virtually the same as present.

9. Recreation, Caves and Karst

Grazing would have little or no effect on the recreational opportunities, since the recreating public has no legal or physical access to this parcel of public land. Recreation activities that could occur within this grazing allotment are limited or non-existent due to land patterns.

No known significant caves or karst features are known to exist on the public lands located within this allotment. Grazing would not affect the karst resources.

B. Impacts of the No Livestock Grazing Alternative

1. Soils

The soil will not be subjected to compaction, chipping or standing vegetation reduction that is associated with livestock grazing. The stability and development of the soil would be about the same as with grazing. Soil compaction would be reduced on the allotment around drinking troughs and along trails.

2. Vegetation

There would be small change in the types and amounts of vegetation found within the allotment. It is expected that the number of plant species found within the allotment will remain the same. Vegetation will continue be utilized by wildlife but the removal of the standing vegetation by livestock would be absent. This would result in an increase in the amount of standing vegetation and an increase in the accumulated litter on the ground.

3. Wildlife

There would be no competition between livestock and wildlife for forage or cover.

4. Threatened and Endangered Species

There would be no change to the bald eagle or the peregrine falcon habitat if the no grazing alternative was selected.

5. Livestock Management

Under the no grazing alternative there would be no grazing on the federal land in the area of Allotment 64071. This would have an adverse economic impact to the livestock operation.

6. Visual Resources

No change in the visual resources, scale, land-form, and color will occur with the no grazing alternative.

7. Water Quality

A slight improvement in surface water quality will be achieved with the no grazing alternative. This is anticipated because the removal of standing vegetation will not be occurring to the degree allowed in the proposed action. More standing vegetation will slow runoff during precipitation events which will reduce sediments into the water. Ground water will not be changed by the no grazing alternative.

8. Air Quality

There would be no change to the air quality with the no grazing alternative.

9. Recreation, Caves and Karst.

This alternative would have no effect on recreation, caves or karst features.

V. Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts of the grazing and no grazing alternatives were considered in Chapter 4 of Rangeland Reform '94 Draft Environmental Impact Statement and in Chapter 4 of the Roswell Resource Area Proposed RMP/EIS. The no livestock grazing alternative was not selected in either document.

On the allotment specific level, there will be no cumulatively significant impacts from the proposed action or from the no grazing alternative.

VI. Residual Impacts

The area has been grazed by livestock since the early part of the 1900's, if not longer. Recent vegetative monitoring studies have shown that grazing, at the current permitted numbers of animals, is sustainable. If the mitigation measures are enacted, then there would be no residual impacts to the proposed action.

VII. Mitigating Measures

Vegetation monitoring studies will continue to be conducted and the permitted numbers

of livestock will be adjusted if necessary. If new information surfaces that livestock grazing is negatively impacting other resources, action will be taken at that time to mitigate those impacts.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/RATIONALE

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined the proposed action will not have significant impacts on the human environment and that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Rational for Recommendations: The proposed action would not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation. The proposed action will be in compliance with the Roswell Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (October, 1997)

T. R. Kreager,
Acting Assistant Field Office Manager - Resources

Date